

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

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SUBJ: MEDIA SPECULATION ON MILITARY SPLIT

REF: DAO IR 6 879 0137 76

SUMMARY: LISBON MEDIA IS INTERPRETING FEB 27 ALLUSIONS BY AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF MORAIS DE SILVA TO INTERNAL REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL DISAGREEMENT OVER ANGOLA RECOGNITION AS INDICATION OF DEEPER SPLIT WITHIN MILITARY. END SUMMARY.

1. DIVISION IN MILITARY: LISBON PRESS IS INTERPRETING FEB 27 ALLUSIONS BY AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF MORAIS DE SILVA TO DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (RC) OVER CONFIDENTIAL

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QUESTION OF ANGOLA RECOGNITION (REFTEL) AS INDICATION

OF WIDER SPLIT WITHIN PORTUGAL'S TOP MILITARY LEADERSHIP. IN ITS MARCH 2 COVERAGE OF SPEECH, STATE OPERATED TELEVISION STATION PLACED HEAVY EMPHASIS ON MORAIS DE SILVA'S WARNING AGAINST "ANTI-DEMOCRATIC" FORCES WITHIN THE MILITARY. IT REFERRED DIRECTLY TO FONMIN MAJ MELO ANTUNES AS POSSIBLE LEADER OF CAMP AGAINST WHICH MORAIS DA SILVA HAD WARNED.

2. FARMERS PROTEST: SEVERAL THOUSAND FARMERS IN THE TOWN OF POMBAL, MIDWAY ON THE RAIL LINE BETWEEN LISBON AND OPORTO, BLOCKED RAIL TRAFFIC BETWEEN THE TWO CITIES FOR ONE HOUR MARCH 1 TO PROTEST GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE THEM WITH SEED POTATOES IN TIME FOR SPRING PLANTING. ALLEGING THAT LARGE QUANTITIES OF SEED POTATOES WERE BEING HELD BY SPECULATORS HOPING TO DRIVE UP PRICES, THEY GAVE GOVERNMENT UNTIL MARCH 8 TO SATISFY DEMANDS. THEY THREATENED TO RESORT TO NEW AND WIDER-RANGING FORMS OF PROTEST AFTER THAT DATE. PORTUGAL IMPORTS LARGE PORTION OF SEED POTATO STOCKS FROM ABROAD; CURRENT SHORTFALLS REPORTEDLY RESULT FROM GENERAL EUROPE-WIDE POTATO SHORTAGE.

3. GINUEA BISSAU ASSETS FROZEN: GOP ANNOUNCED MARCH 3 IT HAD FROZEN LISBON ASSETS OF BISSAU BRANCH OF BANCO NACIONAL ULTRAMINO (BNU). SINCE RECEIVING ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1975, GUINEA-BISSAU HAD USED LISBON BASED BNU AS A BANK OF ISSUANCE. ON MARCH 1, BISSAU GOVERNMENT UNILATERALLY TRANSFERRED ISSUANCE FUNCTION TO ITS OWN NATIONAL BANK OF GUINEA, FROZE BNU ASSETS IN BISSAU, AND CREATED OWN CURRENCY, THE GUINEAN PESO. IN TAKING DECISION TO FREEZE LISBON ASSETS OF BISSAU BNU BRANCH, GOP EXPRESSED ITS WILLINGNESS TO ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS TO RESOLVE OUTSTANDING FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT "PORTUGUESE RIGHTS" WOULD HAVE TO BE PROTECTED IN ANY FINAL SOLUTION.

4. CONTREIRAS AND JUDAS FREED: FORMER RC MEMBERS CDR ALMADA CONTREIRAS AND LT MIGUEL JUDAS WERE FREED MARCH 1. THEY HAD BEEN DETAINED FOR THEIR ROLE IN THE ATTEMPTED COUP OF NOV 25. THEIR RELEASE BRINGS TO 19 THE NUMBER OF LEFTIST OFFICERS STILL UNDER DETENTION AS A RESULT OF THE COUP.

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5. COMMENT: THE RC SINCE THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGE IN THE COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP HAS MANAGED TO AVOID AIRING ITS DISPUTES PUBLICLY. MORAIS DA SILVA'S REMARKS ARE THE FIRST BREAK, AND DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RC WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY IN MAINTAINING A UNITED PUBLIC FRONT IN THE FACE OF POLITICAL PRESSURES AS THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION CAMPAIGN HEATS UP AND THE MILITARY MUST DECIDE ON A

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